The Real Man

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Illustrations by IRWIN MYERS

CHAPTER XVIII.

—14—

The Arrow to the Mark.

Smith, concentrating abstractedly, as his habit was, upon the work in hand, was still deep in the voucher-auditing when the office door was opened and a small shocked voice said: "Oh, wooh! how you startled me! I saw the light, and I supposed, of course, it was colonel-daddy. Where is he?"

Smith pushed the papers aside and looked up scowling.

"He was here a minute ago, with Stillings. Said he'd be back. You've come to take him home?"

She nodded and came to sit in a chair at the desk-end, saying:

"Don't let me interrupt you, please. I'll be quiet."

"I don't mean to let anything interrupt me until I have finished what I have undertaken to do; I'm past all that, now."

"I have heard about what you did last night."

"About the newspaper fracas? You don't approve of anything like that, of course. Neither did I, once. But there is no middle way. You know what the animal tamers tell us about the beasts. I've had my taste of blood. There are a good many men in this world who need killing. Crawford Stanton is one of them, and I'm not sure that Mr. David Kinzie isn't another."

"I can't hear what you say when you talk like that," she objected, looking past him with the gray eyes veiled.

"Do you want me to lie down and let them put the steam roller over me?" he demanded irritably. "Is that your ideal of the perfect man?"

"What I said, and what I meant, had nothing at all to do with Timanyoni High Line and its fight for life," she said calmly, recalling the wandering gaze and letting him see her eyes. "I was thinking altogether of one man's attitude toward his world."

"That was some time ago," he put in soberly. "I've gone a long way since then, Corona."

"I know you have. Why doesn't daddy come back?"

"He'll come soon enough. You're not afraid to be here alone with me, are you?"

"No; but anybody might be afraid of the man you are going to be."

His laugh was as mirthless as the creaking of a rusty hinge.

"You needn't put it in the future tense. I have already broken with whatever traditions there were left to break with. Last night I threatened to kill Allen, and, perhaps, I should have done it if he hadn't begged like a dog and dragged his wife and children into it."

"I know," she acquiesced, and again she was looking past him.

"And that isn't all. Yesterday Kinzie set a trap for me and baited it with one of his clerks. For a little while it seemed as if the only way to spring the trap was for me to go after the clerk and put a bullet through him. It wasn't necessary, as it turned out, but if it had been—"

"Oh, you couldn't!" she broke in quickly. "I can't believe that of you!"

"You think I couldn't? Let me tell you of a thing that I have done. Night before last Verda Richlander had a wire from a young fellow who wants to marry her. He had found out that she was here in Brewster, and the wire was to tell her that he was coming in that night on the delayed 'Flyer.' She asked me to meet him and tell him she had gone to bed. He is a miserable little wretch; a sort of sham reprobate; and she has never cared for him, except to keep him dangling around with a lot of others. I told her I wouldn't meet him, and she knew very well that I couldn't meet him—and stay out of jail. Are you listening?"

"I'm trying to."

"It was the pinch, and I wasn't big enough—in your sense of the word—to meet it. I saw what would happen. If Tucker Jibbey came here, Stanton would pounce upon him at once; and Jibbey, with a drink or two under his belt, would tell all he knew. I fought it all out while I was waiting for the train. It was Jibbey's effacement, or the end of the world for me, and for Timanyoni High Line."

Dexter Baldwin's daughter was not of those who shriek and faint at the apparition of horror. But the gray eyes were dilating and her breath was coming in little gasps when she said:

"I can't believe it! You are not going to tell me that you met this man as a friend, and then—"

"No; it didn't quite come to a murder in cold blood, though I thought it might. I had Maxwell's runabout, and I got Jibbey into it. He thought I was going to drive him to the hotel. After we got out of town he grew suspicious, and there was a struggle in the auto. I—I had to beat him over the head to make him keep quiet; I thought for the moment that I had killed him, and I knew, then, just how far I had gone on the road I've been traveling ever since a certain night in the middle of last May. The proof was in the way I felt; I wasn't either sorry or horror-stricken; I was merely relieved to think that he wouldn't trouble me, or clutter up the world with his worthless presence any longer."

"But that wasn't your real self!" she expostulated.

"What was it, then?"

"I don't know—I only know that it wasn't you. But tell me: did he die?"

"No."

"What have you done with him?"

"Do you know the old abandoned Wire-Silver mine at Little Butte?"

"I knew it before it was abandoned, yes."

"I was out there one Sunday afternoon with Starbuck. The mine is bulkheaded and locked, but one of the keys on my ring fitted the lock, and Starbuck and I went in and stumbled around for a while in the dark tunnels. I took Jibbey there and locked him up. He's there now."

"Alone in that horrible place—and without food?"

"Alone, yes; but I went out yesterday and put a basket of food where he could get it."

"What are you going to do with him?"

"I am going to leave him there until after I have put Stanton and Kinzie and the other buccaneers safely out of business. When that is done, he can go; and I'll go, too."

She had risen, and at the summing-up she turned from him and went aside to the one window to stand for a long minute gazing down into the electric-lighted street. When she came back her lips were pressed together and she was very pale.

"When I was in school, our old psychology professor used to try to tell us about the undersman; the brute that lies dormant inside of us and is kept down only by reason and the superman. I never believed it was anything more than a fine-spun theory—until now. But now I know it is true."

He spread his hands.

"I can't help it, can I?"

"The man that you are now can't help it; no. But the man that you could be—if he would only come back—" she stopped with a little uncontrollable shudder and sat down again, covering her face with her hands.

"I'm going to turn Jibbey loose—after I'm through," he vouchsafed.

She took her hands away and blazed up at him suddenly, with her face aflame.

"Yes! after you are safe; after there is no longer any risk in it for you! That is worse than if you had killed him—worse for you, I mean. Oh, can't you see? It's the very depth of cowardly infamy!"

He smiled sourly. "You think I'm a coward? They've been calling me everything else but that in the past few days."

"You are a coward!" she flashed back. "You have proved it. You daren't go out to Little Butte tonight and get that man and bring him to Brewster while there is yet time for him to do whatever it is that you are afraid he will do!"

Was it the quintessence of feminine subtlety, or only honest rage and indignation, that told her how to aim the armor-piercing arrow? God, who alone knows the secret workings of the woman heart and brain, can tell. But the arrow sped true and found its mark. Smith got up stiffly out of the big swing chair and stood glooming down at her.

"You think I did it for myself?—just to save my own worthless hide?

"You Are a Coward," She Flashed Back.

I'll show you; show you all the things that you say are now impossible. Did you bring the gray roadster?"

She nodded briefly.

"Your father is coming back; I hear the elevator bell. I am going to take the car, and I don't want to meet him. Will you say what is needful?"

She nodded again, and he went out quickly. It was only a few steps down the corridor to the elevator landing, and the stair circled the caged elevator shaft to the ground floor. Smith halted in the darkened corner of the stairway long enough to make sure that the colonel, with Stillings and a woman in an automobile coat and veil—a woman who figured for him in the passing glance as Corona's mother—got off at the office floor. Then he ran down to the street level, cranked the gray roadster and sprang in to send the car rocketing westward.

CHAPTER XIX.

A Little Leaven.

The summer-night stars served only to make the darkness visible along the road down the Timanyoni river and across to the mining camp of Red Butte. Smith twisted the gray roadster sharply to the left out of the road, and four miles from the turn, shut off the power and got down to continue his journey afoot. The mine workings were tunnel-driven in the mountainside, and a crooked ore track led out to them. Smith followed the ore track until he came to the entrance, and to the lock of a small door framed in the bulkheading he applied a key.

It was pitch dark beyond the door, and the silence was like that of the grave. Smith had brought a candle on his food-carrying visit of the day before, and, groping in its hiding place just outside of the door, he found and lighted it. There was no sign of occupancy save Jibbey's suitcase lying where it had been flung on the night of the assisted disappearance.

Smith stumbled forward into the black depths and the chill of the place laid hold upon him and shook him like the premonitory shiver of an approaching ague. Insensibly he quickened his pace until he was hastening blindly through a maze of tunnels and cross driftings, deeper and still deeper into the bowels of the mountain. Coming suddenly at the last into the chamber of the dripping water, he found what he was searching for, and again the ague chill shook him. There were no apparent signs of life in the sodden, muck-begrimed figure lying in a crumpled heap among the water pools.

"Jibbey!" he called; and then again ignoring the unnerving, awe-inspiring echoes rustling like flying bats in the cavernous overspaces: "Jibbey!"

The sodden heap bestirred itself slowly and became a man sitting up to blink helplessly at the light and supporting himself on one hand.

"Is that you, Monty?" said a voice tremulous and broken; and then: "I can see. The light blinds me. Have you come to finish the job?"

"I have come to take you out of this; to take you back with me to Brewster. Get up and come on."

The victim of Smith's ruthlessness struggled stiffly to his feet. Never much more than a physical weakling, and with his natural strength wasted by a life of dissipation, the blow on the head with the pistol butt and the forty-eight hours of sharp hardship and privation had cut deeply into his scanty reserves.

"Did—did Verda send you to do it?" he queried.

"No; she doesn't know where you are. She thinks you stopped over somewhere on your way west. Come along, if you want to go back with me."

Jibbey stumbled away a step or two and flattened himself against the cavern wall. His eyes were still staring and his lips were drawn back to show his teeth.

"Hold on a minute," he jerked out. "You're not—not going to wipe it all out as easy as that. You've taken my gun away from me, but I've got my two hands yet. Stick that candle in a hole in the wall and look out for yourself. I'm telling you, right now, that one or the other of us is going to stay here—and stay dead!"

"Don't be a fool!" Smith broke in. "I didn't come here to scrap with you."

"You'd better—and you'd better make a job of it while you're about it!" shrieked the castaway, lost now to everything save the biting sense of his wrongs. "You've put it all over me—knocked my chances with Verda Richlander and shut me up here in this hell-hole to go mad-dog crazy! If you let me get out of here alive I'll pay you back, if it's the last thing I ever do! You'll go back to Lawrenceville with the bracelets on! You'll—" red rage could go no farther in mere words and he flung himself in feeble fierceness upon Smith, clutching and struggling and waking the grewsome echoes again with frantic, meaningless maledictions.

Smith did not strike back; wrapping the madman in a pinioning grip, he held him helpless. When it was over, and Jibbey had been released, gasping and sobbing, to stagger back against the tunnel wall, Smith groped for the candle and found and relighted it.

"Tucker," he said gently, "you are more of a man than I took you to be—a good bit more. Now that you're giving me a chance to say it, I can tell you that Verda Richlander doesn't figure in this at all. I'm not going to marry her, and she didn't come out here in the expectation of finding me."

"Then what does figure in it?" was the dry-lipped query.

"It was merely a matter of self-preservation. There are men in Brewster who would pay high for the information you might give them about me."

"You might have given me a hint and a chance, Monty. I'm not all dog."

"That's all past and gone. I didn't give you your chance, but I'm going to give it to you now. Let's go—if you're fit to try it."

"Wait a minute. If you think, because you didn't pull your gun now and drop me and leave me to rot in this hole, if you think that squares the deal—"

"I'm not making any conditions," Smith interposed. "There are a number of telegraph offices in Brewster, and for at least two days longer I shall always be within easy reach."

Jibbey's anger flared up once more.

"You think I won't do it? You think I'll be so glad to get to some place where they sell whisky that I'll forget all about it and let you off? Don't you make any mistake, Monty Smith! You can't knock me on the head and lock me up as if I were a yellow dog. I'll fix you!"

Smith made no reply. Linking his free arm in Jibbey's, he led the way through the mazes, stopping at the tunnel mouth to blow out the candle and to pick up Jibbey's suitcase. In the open air the freed captive tramped in sober silence at Smith's heels until they reached the automobile. At the crossing of the railroad main track and the turn into the highway, the river, bassooning deep-toned among its bowlders, was near at hand, and Jibbey spoke for the first time since they left the mine mouth.

"I'm horribly thirsty, Monty. That water in the mine had copper or something in it, and I couldn't drink it. You didn't know that, did you—when you put me in there, I mean? Won't you stop the car and let me go and stick my face in that river?"

The car was brought to a stand and Jibbey got out to scramble down the river bank in the starlight. Obeying some inner prompting which he did

"If You Think That Squares the Deal."

not stop to analyze, Smith left his seat behind the wheel and walked over to the edge of the embankment where Jibbey had descended. With the glare of the roadster's acetylenes turned the other way, Smith could see Jibbey at the foot of the slope lowering himself face downward on his propped arms to reach the water. Then, in that instant, Jibbey, careless in his thirst, lost his balance and went headlong into the torrent.

A battling eon had passed before Smith, battered, beaten and half-strangled, succeeded in landing the unconscious thirst-quencher on a shelving bank three hundred yards below the stopped automobile. After that there was another eon in which he completely forgot his own bruisings while he worked desperately over the drowned man, raising and lowering the limp arms while he strove to recall more of the resuscitative directions given in the Lawrenceville Athletic club's first-aid drills.

In good time, after an interval so long that it seemed endless to the despairing first-aider, the breath came back into the reluctant lungs. Jibbey coughed, choked, gasped and sat up. His teeth were chattering, and he was chilled to the bone by the sudden plunge into the cold snow-water, but he was unmistakably alive.

"What—what happened to me, Monty?" he shuddered. "Did I tumble in?"

"You did, for a fact."

"And you went in after me?"

"Of course."

"No, by gad! It wasn't 'of course'—not by a long shot! All you had to do was to let me go, and the score—your score—would have been wiped out for good and all. Why didn't you do it?"

"Because I promised somebody that I would bring you back to Brewster tonight, alive and well, and able to send a telegram."

Jibbey tried to get upon his feet, couldn't quite compass it, and sat down again.

"I don't believe a word of it," he mumbled, loose-lipped. "You did it because you're not so danged tough and hard-hearted as you thought you were." And then: "Give me a lift, Monty, and get me into the auto. I guess—I'm about—all in."

Smith half led, half carried his charge up to the road. A final heave lifted him into his place, and it is safe to say that Colonel Dexter Baldwin's roadster never made better time than it did on the race which finally brought the glow of the Brewster town lights reddening against the eastern sky.

At the hotel Smith helped his dripping passenger out of the car, made a quick rush with him to an elevator, and so up to his own rooms on the fourth floor.

"Strip!" he commanded; "get out of those wet rags and tumble into the bath. Make it as hot as you can stand it. I'll go down and register you and have your trunk sent up from the station. You have a trunk, haven't you?"

Jibbey fished a soaked card baggage check out of his pocket and passed it over.

"You're as bad off as I am, Monty," he protested. "Wait and get some dry things on before you go."

"I'll be up again before you're out of the tub. I suppose you'd like to put yourself outside of a big drink of whisky, just about now, but that's one thing I won't buy for you. How would a pot of hot coffee from the cafe strike you?"

"You could make it baby food and I'd drink it if you said so," chattered the drowned one from the inside of the wet undershirt he was trying to pull off over his head.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Temperance Notes

(Conducted by the National Woman's Christian Temperance Union.)

PROHIBITION AND COAL.

Under the above caption a recent number of The Outlook in a "special correspondence" article directs attention to the coal situation. With new factories springing up everywhere to meet war demands, says the author, Lewis T. Theiss, "nothing but a hugely increased output of coal can prevent prices from reaching a ruinous figure." Among the things which stand in the way of increasing the output are, he points out, the draft, the impossibility of employing a greater number of coal miners because of the falling off in immigration, and obvious difficulties in "speeding up" the organized mine workers. "Under these conditions," continues Mr. Theiss, "it is interesting to note the effect of prohibition on the output of coal in regions that have gone dry." He reminds us that when, at the time of the trouble between the Colorado Fuel and Iron company and its employees, the saloons were closed, the average production of coal per man per day was greatly increased.

A comparison made by the White Oak Coal company of West Virginia, covering the three months prior to June 30, 1914, the date the dry law went into effect, and the three months following, shows an increase during July, September and October of 32,198.35 tons. These figures are furnished by Mr. W. B. Reed, chief accountant, who adds: "It is safe to assume that the same rate of increase would be carried out throughout the entire year, and if that be the case, the result would show an increased production per annum, due to the absence of liquor in the field, of 128,793 tons." And this is the increase of a single company.

Mr. J. D. A. Morrow of the Pittsburg Coal Producers' association is quoted as stating to the interstate commerce commission that the production of coal in the Pittsburgh district alone would be increased 5,000,000 tons if strong drink were eliminated.

"In fact," says Mr. Theiss in conclusion, "all testimony on the subject, from factory, mine and shop, tells the same story—take away drink and the efficiency of the workingman increases amazingly. The simplest, the surest, the only certain way of increasing coal production at this time is by prohibiting drink. . . . If we want cheaper coal during the war we must take, as a war measure, the one and only step that will surely increase coal production."

FOOTSTEPS OF FATHER.

The story is told of a saloonkeeper who went home one afternoon and found his wife away from home and his three boys in the back yard, where they had a bench, some bottles and tumblers and were playing "saloon." The youngest, who was behind the bar, had a towel tied around his waist and appeared to be setting up the drinks pretty freely. The father was dismayed at the nature of the children's play, a feeling that turned to the deepest alarm as he realized that actual beer was being dispensed over the make-believe bar, and that his boys were staggering, while a neighbor lad lay drunk under a tree. When the mother returned she found the boys in bed and her husband sobbing like a child. That night the saloon was closed, and its former keeper entered another line of business.

WAR BEER-INSPIRED?

Speaking of the use of beer by the students of Germany, Professor Sins of the University of Bonn says: "The flooding of the stomach and brain with beer, so prevalent among our students, I regard as a national evil, whether considered from the hygienic, economic or intellectual point of view."

Speaking of its moral effects, Dr. A. Forel of the University of Zurich says: "Among the academic youth of Germany the drinking of beer has truly killed the ideals and the ethics, and has produced an incredible vulgarity." And Dr. Edward Hartman: "Although of all nations Germany has the greatest capacity for culture, the general culture of its higher classes is undergoing frightful retrogression, because of the beer consumption of its students."

BARLEY CROP INCREASES.

More barley is being produced in Washington since the prohibition law became effective than before, according to the annual report of R. D. Jarboe, state grain inspector. He states that the receipts of barley from July 1 to November 1, 1916, were 3,075,719 bushels as against 2,730,525 for the same period of 1915. This in spite of the fact that the demand for the grain for the manufacture of intoxicating liquor has been cut off in all Northwestern states.

THE WHITE RIBBON.

The white ribbon follows the flag. There goes to the battle front in France a motor ambulance as the gift of the W. C. T. U. of the United States. The driver is a member of the New York Young People's branch of the organization.

GOOD FOR MAINE.

Maine enacted its first state-wide prohibitory law in 1851. Since that time it has elected 27 different governors, 22 of whom have favored the law.

Wonder if congress has considered a tax on spirit slants as a means of raising revenue?

IS WELL WORTHY OF HONOR

Southern Journal Puts Forward the Claims of the Sunflower as the National Emblem.

There is nowhere such a yellow as in the petals of the biggest and most cheerfully nodding of all the black-eyed susans we have; there is nowhere such a richness as in the brown of its seeded heart. Nothing that grows is so friendly, so gracefully companionable whether through an open window or brushing idly and happily up against one's person. It is the weakling, the strong and lusty sunflower. It is largely masculine, with its straightness, disdain of pampering and love of the air it breathes and soil from which it springs. Adversity but builds it stronger, and extremes of weather affect it little. Our national flower, which we believe is the goldenrod, if it isn't quite satisfactory, let's adopt the fine, upstanding yellow sunflower, the king, monarch, complacent ruler of every flower that waves. Everything about King Sunflower is typically American and he's a democrat to the fiber and root of his being. What is just what we want in America at this time.—Macon Telegraph.

Fruit Production.

The production of apples in this country during the last six years has averaged over (illegible) barrels. The estimated value of this apple crop for 1915 was $74,000,000. The product of peaches in 1914 was estimated at 54,000,000 bushels, and of pears for that year 13,000,000 bushels. Considering all of the hardy fruits of the North and the tropical fruits of the South, what a vast bulk is gathered every year. Surely farmer and stockraiser cannot come to a poultry thus supplied.

Too Slow.

Railway Manager—Another farmer is suing us on account of his cows.

Lawyer—Killed by our trains?

Railway Manager—No; he complains that our passengers are leaning out of the windows and milking them as the trains go by.

"No really great man ever thought himself so."—Hazlitt.